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Inclusive Education: Perspective, Challenges, and Changing Role of Teacher Educator in India

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Abstract

Inclusive Education: Perspective, Challenges, and Changing Role of Teacher Educator - is a crucial and relevant area of research in Inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to provide equal educational opportunities to all students, including those with disabilities or diverse learning needs, in the same classrooms and schools as their non-disabled peers. This research topic will explore various perspectives on inclusive education, including the advantages and difficulties of implementing inclusive practices. Additionally, this research will examine the evolving role of teacher educators in supporting inclusive education and overcoming the challenges that arise in implementing inclusive practices. The findings of this research will have significant implications for teacher education programs, as well as for the development of inclusive education policies and practices.

Keywords*: Perspective, Challenges & Changing Role of Teacher Educator*

Introduction

The education of children with exceptional needs has advanced significantly over time, from special education through the segregated and integrated system to inclusive education (access to the mainstream). Children with special needs must be educated in regular classrooms, in their local communities, and by ordinary teachers. Diversity is valued via inclusion. It accepts that every child has a unique set of skills and requirements and that the fundamental right to learn belongs to every learner (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2013)

This has occasionally been supported by a variety of policies and programs. The education of children with impairments was brought to light by the Education Commission in 1966. The National Education Policy (1968), which adopted the Kothari commission's recommendations, proposed building more educational facilities and creating an "integrated program" to allow students with disabilities to attend regular schools. The program, Integrated Education for Disabled Students (1974), placed a strong emphasis on including disabled children in regular classrooms. The District Primary Education Programme (1994), the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), and other documents advocated curricular, assessment, and structural improvements. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000), the Right to Education Act (2009), and Article 21 of the Constitution, which establishes education as a fundamental right applicable to all children, all played key roles in quickening the speed of all efforts made in this regard. The National Policy on Education (1986) and its revised policy (1992) are the guiding

policies at all levels because they supported integrating children with mild disabilities into the normal population and stated that “the objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth, and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence” (Marion & Neelima, 2015).

Indian Education System is one of the largest Education systems after the USA and China. Here more than 25 crore school-going children, 8 million Teachers, and 1.6 million institutions is there. in such schools included all kind of diversified learner. In India, 2.68 billion people, or 2.21% of the 121 billion people, are classified as "disabled" according to the 2011 Census. Focused actions for the welfare of disabled people are crucial in a time when "inclusive development" is being highlighted as the best route to sustainable development. However, according to the 2011 Census, 89 percent of school-going children with special needs attend elementary school, while only 2% attend upper secondary. In the Current status of inclusive Education in India, the Swabhiman survey found that 56.48% of students are continuing their education while the rest of the 42% planning to drop out (Sawbhiman Survey, The Hindu, 2020). Only 40% of school buildings have a ramp and 17% of schools have accessible toilets. Although technology is a key focus in new education policy, only 59% of institutions have access to electricity (Sarkar,2017).

New Educational Policy 2020 seems to recognize various forms of marginalization and exclusion with the acronym SEDG (Socioeconomic Disadvantage Group) which addresses various discrimination based on Gender, religion, caste, culture, and income. Inclusive Education means equitable education and No children left behind. It involves respecting physical, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, economic, gender, and spiritual differences that children bring and believing that every child no matter what learning profile is, can make a valued contribution to society. Inclusive Education is a continuous integration process and not a pre-determined goal (National Education Policy, 2020).

New Education Policy gives sound emphasis on the Teacher Education program and the Continuous professional development of Teachers where the prepared teacher in an inclusive education mindset is a key aspect. While Inclusive Education has its benefits but there are enormous challenges and delays in effective implementation, especially in the field of Teacher Education.

Many special needs children do not have access to education, despite all the efforts made in this area. India's Rehabilitation Council believes that 30 million children with special needs lack access to education, and it wants to change that by 2020 by educating 10% of kids (Draft National Policy on Special Education, 2002). On the other hand, regular schools with an inclusive orientation encounter numerous obstacles and difficulties. Some challenges include:

Challenges to Implementing Inclusive Education

1. Default Policies: Diverse students with and without impairments spent the most of their schooldays together under the inclusion approach. The Indian government has devised a number of initiatives to support the expansion of inclusive education. Nevertheless, these policies must be properly implemented. According to RTE-2009, inclusive education is mandated for all schools. No kid should be denied entrance to a school due to discrimination of any type. However, not all schools adhere to this requirement. The administrative provisions in this policy don't seem to be sufficient to ensure proactive leadership. Some schools have been noted to be inclusive, although they do not house any students with disabilities. Some schools refer to themselves as inclusive schools and adhere to an integrated model of education (Bhat & Geelani, 2017).

2. Unfavourable attitude towards Inclusive Education: The success of inclusion is greatly influenced by instructors' attitudes towards inclusive education. Teachers that have a bad attitude might not help kids who have disabilities. Children with special needs feel uncomfortable and unaccepted as a result. Even the parents of non-disabled children do not willingly appreciate the concept of inclusive education. They are hesitant to send their children to learn along with differently-abled children (Bhat & Geelani, 2017; Parveen & Qounsar, 2018).

3. Lack of Awareness: People believed that disabilities may spread. If their kids attend schools alongside students who have varied abilities, parents find it uncomfortable. In addition, parents of children with impairments frequently face discrimination. This illness is exceedingly dangerous. Because these pupils receive appropriate information and are not the focus of their schools (Parveen & Qounsar, 2018).

4. Lack of training of Teachers to deal with different abled learners: Students may experience more difficulties with teachers who are insufficiently trained in the identification of disabilities in the classroom. Insufficient training makes it impossible to accurately identify the needs of a variety of learners. The instructor cannot provide the right learning opportunities for the pupils if they cannot recognise the challenges they confront in the classroom (Grimes et.al, 2017; Heijnen, 2003).

5. The curriculum is rigid and not flexible which does not widen the opportunity for the use of different teaching methods. It also limited the scope for modification according to the requirements of differently-abled students. Most students depend on memory and less emphasis is given to skill development (Kaur, 2018).

6. Limited Accessibility and provision of resources: India is a country of diversity including caste, creed, race, and religion based on which education opportunities become discriminated. Another major challenge is to bring necessary physical and human resources (teacher, non-teaching staff and teacher educator) for the differently abled schools. Especially in rural areas that have poor basic infrastructure like no ramps, western-style toilets along with support staff (Rose et. al., 2021; Goldan et. al., 2022).

7. Lack of participatory activities: there should be proper opportunities for participatory activities in the curriculum which help them to develop a sense of belongingness, respect, group work and mutual relation with non-disabled children (Marion & Neelima, 2015).

8. Lack of Confidence among the teachers: Most of the teachers are not enough confident to teach diverse students in a classroom due to insufficient skills and knowledge. These teachers need rigorous training and knowledge regarding the inclusive system of education (Dash, 2018).

9. Lack of transportation facility: Inclusive education is a learning environment that is physically accessible and welcomes diverse learners to learn together under a single roof. Therefore, transportation facilities for all children especially for disabled children are an important factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education. But lack of proper transportation facilities hampers their access to an inclusive education system with dignity and equality (Kett & Deluca, 2016).

10. Lack of collaboration of the local community: For successful implementation of inclusive education proper local community collaboration, cooperation and participation are prerequisites. But in general, they do not willingly participate in the process of inclusive education (Mitiku et. al., 2014).

The Changing Role of Teacher Educator in the Context of Inclusive Education

It is observed New Education Policy -2020 has given a sound emphasis on horizontal, upskilling and promotion for teachers. Therefore, the role of Teacher Educators has changed in recent years to focus more on promoting inclusive classrooms. The shift has resulted in a greater emphasis on Educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitude needed to support trainees teacher with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Teacher Educators are now expected to model inclusive practice, promote equity and social justice, and help trainee teachers to understand the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for all students. This includes providing training on how to differentiate instruction, incorporate technology, and collaborate with families and other stakeholders. This has expanded the reach of teacher education, making it possible for teachers to cross-training and support regardless of their location.

Moreover, Teacher Educators are increasingly using technology to provide virtual professional development opportunities such as online courses, webinars, and online communities and practice.

Besides teacher educators play a critical role in this by training and preparing future teachers to create inclusive environments

1. Providing ongoing Professional Development opportunities: The professional development of teachers is viewed as a priority as also recognized in recent policy documents (Mzionke Luningo, 2015). Teacher Educators can provide ongoing professional development for teachers for a comprehensive understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion, including different types of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.).

2. Creating awareness of different Policies and Programs: Teacher Educators should play a vital role in creating awareness of different Policies and Programs for Inclusive Education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) act mandates free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years and requires that schools should provide inclusive education to all children with disabilities. (The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, No. 35 of 2009). The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 act seeks to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their full participation in society, including in education. Similarly, it is important for pre-service teachers in India to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the RPWD Act in order to ensure that they are providing inclusive education to all students, regardless of their abilities, and in compliance with the laws and policies of the country (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016)

3. Use diverse teaching strategies: Teacher Educators should train trainee teachers to use diverse teaching strategies and approaches, such as hands-on activities, differentiated instruction, and technology-based tools, in order to meet the needs of all students, including those with diverse backgrounds and abilities, as supported by the education literature (NCTM, 2002; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006)

4. Develop skills for effective classroom management for inclusive education:
Teacher Educators should provide pre-service teachers with practical training on a variety of classroom management strategies, including behavior management, time management, and organization, and foster a supportive learning environment that encourages pre-service teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and ask questions. (Edmund J. Emmer & Barbara S. Clements, 2011).

5. Awareness of various evaluation strategies among trainee teachers: To make the pre-service teachers aware of various evaluation strategies useful for the inclusive classroom. Teacher Educators should demonstrate a range of evaluation strategies and techniques, such as formative and summative assessments, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Teacher Educators have a crucial role to play in making pre-service teachers aware of various evaluation strategies that are useful for the inclusive classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2017).

6. Inculcate knowledge of neurodiversity among trainee teachers: It is important for teacher educators to impart knowledge of neurodiversity among trainee teacher in order to meet the needs of all learners, including those with neurodivergent conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other. This is supported by research in the field of education, which suggests that teachers who are knowledgeable about neurodiversity are better equipped to support students with diverse learning needs and to create inclusive classrooms that meet the needs of all learners (Erevelles, 2011). Besides Teacher educators should assimilate knowledge and equip pre-service as well as in-service teachers to understand whether children are gifted, disabled, or neurodiverse.

7. Practice and incorporate Socio-emotional Learning: It is important for teacher educators to not only have knowledge of social-emotional literacy (SEL) but also to have the ability to model and apply it in their own lives and teaching practices. Research has shown that teacher educators who incorporate SEL into their

own lives and teaching are better equipped to provide effective SEL instruction to their students (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, teachers who have received SEL training are more likely to create supportive and inclusive learning environments that promote the well-being and academic success of their students (Dweck, 2016). Therefore, Teacher Educators should have the potential to be trained in social-emotional literacy (SEL) not only delivery of the curriculum but practicing it and living it.

8. Cultivate a Positive Attitude among trainee teachers regarding Inclusive Education: It is essential for teacher educators to cultivate a positive attitude among trainees toward accepting all children and creating a favorable learning environment. This is supported by research in the field of education, which suggests that teachers who have positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion are more likely to create classrooms that are inclusive and supportive of all students, regardless of their background or abilities (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). By fostering a positive and inclusive attitude among teacher trainees, teacher educators can help to ensure that the next generation of teachers is equipped to create learning environments that are welcoming and supportive of all students.

9. Incorporating inclusive education content into the curriculum: Teacher educators can integrate content on diversity, equity, and inclusion into their courses, encouraging pre-service teachers to think critically about these issues and how they can be addressed in the classroom (Mugambi, 2017).

10. Teacher educators should clarify the concept of peer-tutoring to the pre-service teachers to facilitate the teaching-learning process in a cooperative and collaborative way in an inclusive setting. Peer tutoring helps disabled children to get rid of various learning-related problems with the help of non-disabled children.

Conclusion

The role of teacher educators in training pre-service and in-service teachers for inclusive settings is vital in promoting equitable and inclusive education. Teacher educators can model inclusive practices, provide hands-on experiences, integrate inclusive education content into the curriculum, encourage reflection and self-reflection, and support advocacy. Through these efforts, they can equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to create inclusive classrooms and foster a more equitable and inclusive education system for all students. The paper concludes with the words of Els Heijnen-Maathuis: “Children who learn together, learn to live together.”

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